



SIGNS OF THE TIME FOR ELDERCARE

You visit your elderly parents and see unopened envelopes marked "PAST DUE BILL" on a table. You remember that your father has had some near-falls walking down stairs lately. And your parents seem to be living entirely on cereal and frozen dinners since your mother stopped cooking. You're concerned, but should you be thinking about some kind of help or care for your parents? How can you know when that time has arrived?

Determining whether elders need help – and, if so, what kind – can be difficult and emotional. Whenever possible, it's a good idea to discuss options and make plans in advance, getting input from the elders and the people who are or will be responsible for their care.

The best conversation you can have with elders about assistance for them is one that begins with, "I know this is a long way off, but . . ." This makes it a discussion about the elders' needs and the options for meeting them, instead of a debate about whether help is wanted or needed. Solutions range from simply having someone come by to tidy up and cook to hiring an in-home caregiver to securing assisted-living housing or placement in a nursing home.

Whether you've had that conversation or not, the time may come when you have to ask if some kind of assistance or care is necessary, and the answer isn't always clear cut. But there are some common indications that help may be needed. Here are suggestions of signs to look for from the website for the public television documentary *Caring for Your Parents*:

- » **Difficulties with daily living activities:** Routine chores such as housework, laundry, shopping and cooking aren't getting done. There is a fall off in personal care, such as personal hygiene and dressing. Legal matters and personal finances – including bill paying – are being neglected.
- » **Physical health problems:** There is reduced mobility due to injury or illness. Vision or hearing impairment affects the quality of life, including hindering the ability to interact with people.
- » **Mental health problems:** There may be depression or other emotional disorders that result in personality changes and other problems. Memory loss and confusion make it difficult to handle medication or keep track of personal items.
- » **Problems with nutrition:** Difficulty with cooking and an inability to shop regularly for groceries can lead to a poor diet. Snacks and highly processed foods may become staples because of their convenience.

Caregiving isn't always necessary to address problems such as these. Physical and mental health problems can be diagnosed and treated medically, with marked improvements in some cases. The severity of the problem and how much it affects the quality of life determine whether care is needed and, if so, at what level.

You may need professional help to make the best decisions. Your EAP can help you get it. Care consultants can assist with everything from evaluating needs to finding the right caregiver or facility. You may think the need for care is a long way off, but remember: the best time to explore options and make plans is before you're at the point of crisis.

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Do you think your elderly parents may need living assistance or care? Call your EAP for help!

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